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ABSTRACT

A review of problems surrounding accreditation for the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) at Loyola University in Chicago from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s is presented. It is noted that these problems caused the CSWE to lose credibility with the graduate schools of social work, and reviewing what happened could help avoid similar situations in the future. For years, the deans complained that the Commission on Accreditation (COA) of the CSWE was authoritarian, secretive, inconsistent with accreditation standards, and biased toward certain schools. The Board of Directors and COA paid little attention to requests by the deans until the Council verged on bankruptcy in 1984 and the deans moved to incorporate their organization, a step that made possible replacement of the Council as the accrediting body for graduate social work unless the Council was reformed. Some matters that clouded the relationship between CSWE and the deans were: CSWE's reaction to the Teicher committee (to discuss accreditation); mandatory minimum standards; evaluation of site visits; practitioner representation on site visit teams; program presence at reviews; access to the readers' reports; revision of accreditation standards; the accreditation cycle; the COA's workload; COA secrecy; withholding of institutional dues; and resources for the COA. Caution is called for in dealing with CSWE. There must be changes in governance and the elimination of politics from the Board and Commission. An appendix lists questions for the COA and tentative recommendations offered by the Committee and augmented by the Conference of Deans. (SM)

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THE COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

AND ACCREDITATION: 1973 - 1986

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*School of
Social Work*

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Preface

When an institutional memory is short it deprives an organization of whatever guidance that memory might provide for its future. Unfortunately, the Council on Social Work Education remembers very little about the problems surrounding accreditation that plagued it from the early 1970's into the mid 1980's. Unacknowledged by the Council, those problems caused it to lose credibility with the graduate schools of social work. As in clinical practice, reviewing what happened may help us avoid similar situations in the future.

This review is based upon the minutes of the Council's Board, other Council documents and those of the deans.^{1*} Minutes of the Commission on Accreditation were not available for review. Several deans and former deans, former members of the Commission on Accreditation and former Board members of the Council provided useful suggestions for this review. Their help is appreciated.

Charles T. O'Reilly
[4 Feb 89]

*For convenience the deans and directors of graduate programs are referred to as deans.

The Council on Social Work Education and Accreditation: 1973 - 1986

Charles O'Reilly
January 1989

Beginning in 1973 the deans and directors of graduate social work programs repeatedly asked the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and its Commission on Accreditation (COA) for changes in accreditation practices and standards. For more than a decade the actions of the COA alienated and preoccupied the deans and on more than one occasion led them to consider leaving the Council to establish another accrediting body.² Finally, in 1984, the deans created a vehicle to make that possible. This paper chronicles a dispute that so polarized attitudes within CSWE that the graduate programs considered taking such an extreme step. Placing the dispute in perspective may help social work education avoid similar crippling disputes in the future.

The pros and cons of the issues involved are not discussed here. For better or worse some were settled although others remain to be negotiated. Whatever the merits of either side's position on those issues, CSWE was found to be burdened with an organization and procedures that prevented long overdue reform. Nor does this paper deal with issues such as CSWE's refusal to share information about its finances and the Board of Directors' (BOD) accountability for the financial crisis of 1984 which

almost destroyed the Council. Those issues exacerbated an already bad situation and deserve separate attention.

For years the deans complained that the COA was authoritarian, secretive, inconsistent in applying accreditation standards, and that it gave preferential treatment to some schools. It also was reputed to have a long memory, which made many deans reluctant to criticize it. An example of how negatively CSWE and the COA came to be viewed is found in a letter to CSWE's president signed by a group of deans in 1980. "It is felt that there have been judgments made by council staff as well as by elected and appointed personnel on what seem to be political or whimsical grounds."³ Such perceptions were pervasive and eroded the COA's credibility as an objective and fair assessor of educational programs.

The BOD and the COA paid little attention to the deans' requests until the Council verged on bankruptcy in 1984.⁴⁵ Exasperated by CSWE's obfuscation of the magnitude of its financial crisis, the deans moved to incorporate their organization, a step that made possible replacing the Council as the accrediting body for graduate social work unless

the Council was reformed. After years of fruitless petitioning they realized that the COA's intransigence was only part of a larger problem. CSWE was structured to support that intransigence. If accreditation was to be reformed, the governance structure had to change and CSWE had to reorder its priorities. The fact that enough deans agreed to place their institutional dues in escrow until assured reform began captured the Board's attention. Negotiations began between the BOD, the deans and the undergraduate program directors. Faced with ruin, the BOD finally agreed to negotiate in apparent good faith with a determined and long ignored constituency.

CSWE is an amalgam of several earlier organizations that came together in the early 1950's to carry out the task of representing social work education, including the accreditation function. CSWE's COA is one of many specialized accrediting agencies recognized by the Council on Post Secondary Accreditation (COPA). Every five years COPA reviews its members to confirm their right to continue their accrediting function. CSWE also is recognized as an accrediting body by the U.S. Department of Education which conducts quadrennial reviews of accrediting bodies.⁶

To understand the accreditation dispute one has to know something about the background of issues that for years diverted CSWE from problems needing urgent attention. Those problems included the decline in MSW enrollments, maintaining the autonomy of social work programs and the virtual end of federal aid to social work education. Disputes about accreditation are not new or limited to social work education; in fact accreditation is a hotly debated topic in higher education. Concern about it has grown, partly because of the parallel expansion of the oversight of programs and institutions by governmental bodies. Subjected to many visits by regional accrediting bodies, specialized accrediting bodies and government agencies, a campus must engage in extensive, time consuming and expensive preparation. In addition, there is the widespread opinion that accrediting bodies can intrude upon rightful institutional autonomy and priorities.

The deans were not alone in their concerns about accreditation. According to a 1980 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* "...many college presidents felt that COPA was not doing enough to

check the specialized agencies and their tendency to tell us exactly what to do."⁷ While educators pay homage to accountability through accreditation, even its staunchest supporters concede that some accreditations are conducted with excessive zeal and dogmatism. Tension, and even an adversarial relationship between programs and their accreditors are not unusual given the nature of any evaluative process. In social work education the inevitable tension escalated to a confrontation between the graduate (MSW) programs, the COA and CSWE.

The COA is an autonomous division of CSWE which reviews accredited BSW and MSW programs every seven years to determine their compliance with accreditation standards. It is also responsible for proposing new or revised accreditation standards to CSWE's BOD. The BOD can either accept new standards or changes in them or it can return them to the Commission but cannot modify them. When satisfied, the BOD approves the standards. The last major revision of accreditation standards was in 1984. Some substantive changes and a few new standards were adopted in 1988.

The COA has substantial responsibilities beyond considering requests for initial accreditation and the reaccreditation of existing programs. It must hear appeals, consider new standards and guidelines and revise old ones. Its members are unpaid volunteers who usually meet three times a year for three day and sometimes four day sessions at which programs are reviewed. COA members are appointed by the President of CSWE for renewable three year terms. In 1980 it had 23 members, two of whom were "public," non social work members, and in 1988 it had 30 members.

Although the deans' concerns about accreditation antedated CSWE's approval of the BSW as the first professional degree in social work, that approval played a role in the dispute.⁸ In 1969, social work's largest professional membership organization, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), defined the BSW level as professional. When CSWE followed suit in 1974 with the accreditation of BSW education, the graduate schools, which had been CSWE's major constituency and basic source of financial support, found themselves outnumbered by the undergraduate programs.

Another factor complicating the role of the graduate programs within CSWE was the change

in CSWE's governance that occurred in the early 1970's. At that time the House of Delegates (HOD) was the Council's policy setting body. It met once a year to set policy and program priorities. In 1972, both the deans and the undergraduate directors were recognized as constituent members of the HOD. The HOD expanded to include, among others, students and minority group representatives. Today, however, the HOD has become only an advisory body and the BOD sets policies and priorities.

As the agendas of the new groups came to the fore, the business of the HOD became more complicated and "balkanized," according to a 1980 CSWE task force report on the governance structure of the Council. (CSWE 80-10-43) Although more than half of the graduate programs had undergraduate programs, in practice the joint programs were viewed as solely graduate both by CSWE and the undergraduate educators. The outnumbered graduate programs felt that their problems with accreditation were ignored, although they provided most of the Council's financial support.

There is no disguising the fact that for many years there were hard feelings between the graduate and undergraduate programs. When accredited social work education was solely graduate education, some of its leaders were highly critical of undergraduate education. Their attitudes persisted, preventing what might have been a natural alliance between what became graduate and undergraduate factions. Although the BSW programs may have been more vulnerable to the allegedly arbitrary actions by the COA, their organization was finding its identity and directed its attention elsewhere. For more than a decade conflicting attitudes and some real differences led the two groups to follow different priorities. Cooperation languished until CSWE's financial crisis brought them together in an effort to save the Council.

Until the late 1960's the graduate deans and directors met for dinner once a year with CSWE's officers at the Annual Program Meeting of the Council. At this informal social occasion new deans were introduced, friendships were renewed and information was exchanged. About 1970, recognizing they they had concerns apart from CSWE, the deans began to meet separately to discuss matters of common interest. No formal organization existed until 1972 when the deans agreed to pay dues to a "Con-

ference of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work." Later this became the American Association of Schools of Social Work, a title changed in 1986 to the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work. Initially the Conference meetings were rather general and included presentations by persons from federal agencies and the exchange of information.

In the early 1970's accreditation became a recurrent topic of discussion at the deans' meetings and in 1973 the Conference asked a committee chaired by Dean Morton Teicher to meet with the COA to discuss the deans' concerns about accreditation. That was the first formal approach by the deans to the COA regarding accreditation problems. Because deans served on the BOD and the COA it may seem strange that those bodies had not responded to what were by then the well known concerns of the deans. One might assume that in the overall interest of organizational harmony those concerns would have been brought to the BOD and COA by deans who were members of those bodies. However, since they did not serve as representatives of the deans on those bodies, and because some of them did not agree with the positions taken by the Conference, they made it clear that their role was not to carry messages. Nevertheless, whether in agreement with their colleagues or not, whoever smells smoke can cry "fire." Had the intensity and extent of the deans' feelings about the COA been communicated to the COA and BOD, tensions might not have escalated and issues been resolved without a prolonged and bitter struggle. There is little evidence in the BOD minutes that its dean members brought that message to the BOD.

The following are some matters that clouded the relationship between CSWE and the deans.

CSWE'S REACTION TO THE TEICHER COMMITTEE: The Teicher committee met with members of the COA on October 19, 1973. The previous June, in preparation for that meeting, the dean had sent a long list of questions to the COA. The questions, many of which were to reappear in the future, are found in the appendix. At the October meeting the committee did not receive written responses to their questions but were promised them for later. That did not happen. After that meeting CSWE staff summarized the deans' con-

cerns for the BOD at its meeting on November 8, 1973. In response the BOD suggested that the COA prepare a memo outlining COA procedures.⁹ The BOD's minutes devoted 18 lines to a discussion of the deans' concerns, half of which related to the deans' request for a meeting with the COA. CSWE's then executive director said that while the COA was open to such a meeting, it operated under serious time constraints and such meetings could be honored only in instances of "pressing importance." (The November meeting of COA reviewed all of thirteen programs.) The COA preferred that concerns be submitted in writing, which had been done earlier without any result. This lack of responsiveness to what the deans considered matters of "pressing importance" was a precedent for the future relationship between the deans and the COA.

In June 1974, the president of the Conference of Deans told the Teicher committee that the COA was responsive to the deans' requests.¹⁰ In fact, the COA did not accede to most of the deans' requests. Later in 1974 the Conference sent the COA another list, this time of 15 items that the deans had adopted by consensus. It included earlier items and expressed their support for the ten year accreditation cycle, and for permitting the site visit teams to make recommendations to the COA. It also recommended that programs be asked for comments on all proposed changes in COA policies, standards and procedures. Such a commonly accepted practice had not been implemented by the COA of its own volition.

MANDATORY MINIMUM STANDARDS: The most fundamental disagreement between the deans and the COA arose over the issue of "mandatory minimum standards." The deans believed that accreditation standards should be high and that they should be clear and applied uniformly. In 1975 the deans voted unanimously against the recommendation of CSWE's Task Force on Social Work Practice and Education which wanted to use accreditation to address social work practice issues. The deans held that the COA's function was quality assurance, not quality improvement. The latter could be fostered by CSWE in other ways. They wanted clear minimum standards applied without favoritism to all programs. The COA on the other hand, saw its role as going beyond requiring mere compliance with standards to a responsibility to

improve programs. Thus it felt free to apply standards differentially during the review process. The lack of consistency in applying standards was well known because schools shared their experiences around accreditation and heard from site visitors and COA members who reported glaring inconsistencies in the way the COA dealt with programs. Such inconsistency gave rise to doubts about COA's objectivity and to suspicions of favoritism.¹¹

The differential application of standards occurred although as early as 1967, COA staff told the BOD, "Accrediting associations have the responsibility to encourage innovation as well as to set the floors or minimum standards for institutions and programs."¹² COPA made the same point in a letter to CSWE in 1978. Although it extended recognition COPA said, "...the Council (COPA) requests the applicant to submit an interim report, showing specifically detailed minimum criteria for each status granted by the applicant."¹³ Despite these admonitions the COA persisted in selectively applying standards to programs.

THE ROSTER OF SITE VISITORS: Differing ideas about the selection and composition of the site visiting teams that conducted reviews on campus were another source of friction. For years some schools were allowed to negotiate the composition of their site visiting team. However, most schools were strongly discouraged from doing so although it was provided for in the accreditation manual. The deans wanted equal treatment for all programs, hence their request for access to a roster of site visitors. In 1974 the BOD turned down their request. It reversed itself in 1976 and asked the COA to prepare a roster "for site visit teams to include practitioners." In its 1982 report to the U.S. Department of Education the Council said, "the current roster of site visitors is composed of 360 individuals," but this list remained unavailable to programs.¹⁴ The COA had a roster available in June 1986 and told the BOD that it was considering making it public. The roster finally appeared in September 1988 more than a dozen years after it was requested.

The Council's 1982 report to the U.S. Department of Education said that 80 percent of those on the roster had served on a team within the past several years. However, some persons were called upon frequently and remained on the roster indefi-

nitely while others never were asked to serve on teams. Since the staff followed COA policy in assigning teams it was unclear why there could not be an equitable opportunity for those on the roster to serve on teams, even assuming some negotiation with programs. Depending upon many of the same persons as site visitors over long periods seemed hardly consonant with the notion of a genuine peer review.

THE EVALUATION OF SITE VISITS: In June 1986, the COA told the BOD that 95 percent of the comments it received about site visits were positive. For one lengthy period the executive said no formal complaints were received from programs and that no site visitors were removed from the roster because of criticism. That there was no criticism seems improbable because it was widely known that many programs had been highly critical of their site visitors. Apparently telling CSWE informally about problems with site visitors did not count. The fact that on several occasions the COA was asked to begin a formal evaluation of site visits reveals that it continued to ignore what the deans saw as a genuine problem with unprepared and sometimes biased site visitors. In the mid 1970's the COA chair promised that the COA would consider allowing programs to make detailed evaluations of site visits and some evaluation began in 1981. However, it took until 1987 for the COA to implement a detailed evaluation of this important function.

PRACTITIONER REPRESENTATION ON SITE VISIT TEAMS: In 1973 a joint CSWE-NASW board committee recommended that members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) participate in site visits. NASW was to prepare a roster for membership on the teams. The 1974 CSWE's House of Delegates (HOD) favored the idea of practice representation but there was strong opposition to limiting it to NASW members, partly because it might politicize the accreditation process. The issue was deferred and in 1976 the HOD rejected NASW as the sole provider of practitioner site visitors but approved having practitioner team members from NASW and other CSWE member organizations. In 1977 the BOD changed the accreditation standards to require a representative from practice on site visit teams.¹⁵ NASW then

asked the BOD to place its request to be the sole provider of practitioners for site visit teams on the agenda of the upcoming meeting of the HOD. The Board approved the request because of what CSWE's president said was the "special" relationship between CSWE and NASW.

At one time NASW provided a subvention to CSWE to support social work education. That may have been the origin of what CSWE's president called the special relationship. However, although most deans were NASW members they viewed NASW comments about curriculum matters as an effort to exert undue influence on social work education.¹⁶ In 1977 the National Federation of Clinical Social Workers asked for representation on CSWE commissions and other bodies. The Federation was told that NASW was the umbrella organization that speaks for all social work practice and that CSWE's appointments were made as individuals and not as members of organizations. It was not clear how this squared with the Board's "special" relationship with NASW because in practice only NASW members seemed to become site visitors. There were indications in 1988 that this practice may be changing.

PROGRAM PRESENCE AT REVIEWS: At its meeting on November 19, 1974, the BOD approved permitting schools to attend the meeting at which the COA reviewed their program. There were enough stories about deans encountering factual errors or misinterpretation of elements of their program during the COA's review to warrant requests to attend those meetings. Although not all deans wanted to attend, the group saw this as a due process issue and that attendance should be open to all. However, the COA strongly discouraged such attendance and in November 1978 it proposed denying programs that opportunity because it delayed the Commission's business. The BOD then approved COA's proposal. In its report to the U.S. Department of Education in 1980, the COA stated that although a graduate program's representative could attend, undergraduate representatives could not because of the large volume of reviews. Attendance continued to be actively discouraged until finally, by 1987 this right finally was extended to all programs.

ACCESS TO THE READERS' REPORTS: Until about 1980, it was not generally known that three or four COA members would read a program's voluminous self study and the site visit report and then make a recommendation to the entire Commission. The deans had no argument with that procedure but once aware of it, and in the name of fairness and to insure that programs had an opportunity to clarify or rebut the readers' recommendations, they made repeated requests for deans to see the readers' reports. The requests were rebuffed by the COA without explanation and this remains an unresolved issue. Programs continue to be denied access to the evidence upon which their accreditation depends.

THE REVISION OF ACCREDITATION STANDARDS: In July 1979 the BOD agreed to a tight timetable for revision of the accreditation standards.¹⁷ It assumed that the COA would act on its lengthy draft by late September, then send it to programs for comment which then would be considered by the COA. In November the BOD's executive committee would review the draft and return it to the COA for its final action. The COA was to return that final draft to the BOD for action in December. That schedule gave programs virtually no time to study and react to the new standards.

That November the Conference of Deans' meeting erupted over the scheduling as well as the substance of the proposed standards.¹⁸ In a unanimous vote the deans rejected the proposed standards. A move to leave the Council was headed off by CSWE's president who promised to ask the COA to reconsider the draft, and the BOD to defer action. That action by about 70 deans was later reported to the BOD by the COA chair as one of the 130 responses to the draft received by the COA. Significantly, the BOD was not told that this one response represented the opinions of 70 deans.

Dissatisfaction with the proposed new standards led to regional meeting by deans in California, the Southwest, New York, the Northwest and the Midwest in January 1980. Strong criticism of the standards was expressed along with a desire to have the anticipated, new Curriculum Policy Statement available before the new accreditation standards were considered.^{19,20,21} Later that position was affirmed by the Conference of Deans. The tenor

of the communications sent to the Council appears in that of the Northwest deans and directors; they had "minimal trust in the current accreditation procedures and governance structure of the Council on Social Work Education."²²

In 1981, the deans made additional recommendations to the BOD with respect to the proposed revisions of accreditation standards. The BOD received the document and referred it to the COA. Although the referral was appropriate, the BOD minutes reveal little if any discussion of the deans' document and none about the reasons that impelled them to send it to the Board.

THE TIME THE COA ALLOTTED FOR ACCREDITATION REVIEWS: This was one of 26 questions raised for consideration at the deans' meeting in San Diego in November 1977. Many of the questions were identical with those raised originally by the Teicher committee, and then again in 1974, a clear indication that the earlier issues had not been resolved. The deans worried that the COA's approach to accreditation was either extremely efficient or rather pro forma if it could review an average of ten or more programs a day. In either case there were questions about a system that on the average allowed less than an hour to a review that could affect a programs reputation, the credibility of its students' degrees, and perhaps its survival.

THE ACCREDITATION CYCLE: With the advent of undergraduate accreditation the COA's accreditation workload increased suddenly and to a massive extent. Until 1979 most MSW programs were supposed to be reviewed on a ten year cycle. However, as the Teicher committee discovered, programs could receive a variable period of reaccreditation of from two to ten years and this contributed to the COA's workload.²³ BSW programs were on a five year cycle and for several years the COA argued for a five year cycle for both BSW and MSW programs. The rationale for that period of accreditation is not in the BOD minutes and apparently never was presented to the deans. However, references in some CSWE documents show that the COA proposed it in an effort to closely monitor the BSW programs.

The BOD would not accept a COA compro-

mise of five years for BSW and seven for MSW programs. Finally, in 1979 the COA accepted a seven year cycle for both levels, and despite the objections of the deans, the BOD authorized the seven year cycle for both levels. With the accreditation cycle reduced to seven years and the increase in the number of graduate and undergraduate programs, COA's workload automatically expanded sharply. The new cycle also fostered more tension between the deans and the COA.

THE COA'S WORKLOAD: How much did COA's workload increase? Between 1970 and 1980, 14 MSW and 261 BSW programs were added to the COA's calendar. The increase becomes more meaningful when the earlier workload is compared with what happened later. At the COA meeting in March 1968, seven programs were reviewed. In January 1969, five programs were reviewed and another eleven were on the agenda for its next meeting. Thirteen programs were reviewed in November 1973, while thanks to BSW accreditation, in November 1974 the COA reviewed two candidacies, eight reaccreditations and 82 undergraduate programs. By November 1976, staff reported that 62 programs were to be reviewed at COA's next meeting. The COA's report for 1980-1981 noted that it reviewed from 60 to 65 programs at each of its three day meetings. At the October 1985 BOD meeting the COA said 71 programs were reviewed at its October meeting. In 1987-88 it reviewed 68 to 96 programs at each of its meetings. By then the COA had divided itself into two groups and sometimes more in order to facilitate its work. Although this practice may be questionable, it probably is unavoidable given the COA's workload. However, the conditions under which the COA operates and the short time allocated to this vitally important function continues to strike many observers as having the potential for a rush to judgement about program compliance with accreditation standards.

THE TIMING OF CSWE DOCUMENTS: CSWE almost invariably circulated policy documents at the last moment. That gave programs scant time to review them before an arbitrary deadline such as an already scheduled COA meeting. Despite complaints by the schools this practice continued for years. A classic example occurred in 1978.

In a letter dated October 24, 1978, CSWE asked schools to submit their comments about proposed changes in accreditation by November 10th so the BOD could review them at its November meeting. Again, in mid October 1979 the proposed new accreditation standards were sent to the schools and they were asked to respond to them by November 19th. That time frame gave faculty virtually no opportunity to carefully review a complex document. Whether or not this was a deliberate effort to forestall careful review of complicated policy matters, it often had that result.²³

COMMUNICATION WITH PROGRAMS: Many questions addressed to the BOD by the deans do not appear in its minutes, although CSWE officers received them for transmission to the BOD. Most of the issues raised with the COA in 1973 were raised again in 1977.²⁴ That they were raised again in 1984 reveals that the COA had not responded to them. The lack of response heightened the tension between the schools and the COA. The secretive nature of the accreditation process was another long standing bone of contention. In March 1980, for example, the president of the Conference of Deans reported that the Commission operated in an aura of secrecy, an opinion shared that was shared by her colleagues. The COA's secretiveness is illustrated by an incident in 1978. At a deans meeting in 1978, it was learned that COPA was to conduct a review of the COA. The Commission had not notified its constituency of these reviews, telling COPA that it saw no need to do so. [CSWE now prominently advertises the COPA review. See: Social Work Education Reporter, December 1988.] Several deans shared their concerns about the COA with COPA prior to and at the review. Although the COA promised that in the future it would announce its outside reviews and policy changes, when it did so it either allowed programs scant time for comment or as indicated below, often failed to inform programs about policy changes.

As the result of the COPA review and because of "questionable" compliance with two COPA provisions, CSWE was granted "conditional" recognition. The questionable compliance related to issues repeatedly brought to the attention of the Commission and the BOD. COA's chair told the BOD that COPA's response had been positive and said noth-

ing about the complaints made to that agency. Unquestionably, COPA's action hastened the revision of the accreditation standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE SITE VISITING TEAM: On several occasions the deans asked the COA to allow site visit teams to make recommendations about the programs they reviewed. COA policy was that the site visitors were to make only a factual report on their visit. It was well known that in practice the teams made comments about non compliance that were de facto negative recommendations. The deans wanted the teams to have the option of also making positive ones. Following the deans' recommendation, in November 1974, the BOD voted to ask the COA to allow such recommendations. The COA rejected the idea, asserting that it wanted to eliminate the possibility that a team member might comment on a program beyond the content of the site visit report. This logic of allowing one sided recommendations eluded the deans and they unsuccessfully repeated the request several times.

COA SECRECY: The refusal of COA's chair to provide statistical information about COA's activities to a committee of deans in 1979 created more tension.²⁵ After protests at the deans' meeting in March 1980, CSWE's president promised that such information would be available upon request. The promise was repeated shortly afterwards when the COA chair told the HOD that information about COA activities would be provided upon request. Although the situation improved somewhat it continued to be extremely difficult to obtain information about COA activities.

The minutes of the Conference of Deans and Directors show that in March 1980, the chair reported that the central theme of a January meeting with CSWE and COA officers was, "...the lack of credibility of the Commission on Accreditation with the deans and the distrust which characterizes the activities with the Commission and CSWE." The chair added that the Commission operated in an aura of secrecy. Although the deans decried the secrecy with which the COA operated, they had no quarrel with its maintaining confidentiality. However, they contended that revealing the procedures it followed, the kind and number of actions it took,

the names of those on site visit teams, etc., had nothing to do with confidentiality.

THE WITHOLDING OF INSTITUTIONAL DUES: At a 1980 meeting the midwestern deans advocated this strategy to pressure a response from the BOD, but it was not adopted.²⁶ It was reluctantly accepted by the deans in 1984 in a final effort to get CSWE to heed the request for reform. The financial crisis in 1984 provided an opportunity to press the discussion of long ignored issues because withholding complicated CSWE's precarious financial position. In February 1985, a committee of deans met with the BOD and told it of poor communications, governance problems and inadequate support for accreditation. The BOD was told that school dues could be placed in escrow and released only if progress was made in resolving accreditation issues and a task force on the future structure and function of the Council was established. CSWE's new interim executive told the Board that if dues were withheld it would cause serious cash flow problems and if extended beyond July 1, would severely impair the Council.

CSWE's COUNTER TO DUES WITHOLDING: Determined not to be placed in such a position again, in September 1985 the BOD decided to link continuing accreditation to the payment of dues. An undergraduate consortium disturbed by a proposed dues increase had threatened to withhold dues. According to one BOD member the linkage between dues and membership was actually made to counter that threat although the reason given in BOD minutes was that some programs were "freeloading" by seeking accreditation but not paying their dues. No facts about such freeloading appear in the BOD minutes nor were BOD members able to cite the number of freeloaders when asked. CSWE's attorney advised against this linkage because of the risk of a suit against the Council for violation of antitrust laws. The BOD ignored that caveat and voted for the policy. Still, it is not clear how the policy could be enforced if enough programs again decided to place their dues in escrow.

RESOURCES FOR THE COA: The deans realized that some of the COA's problems were due to its inadequate resources and they frequently

brought this to the BOD's attention. The BOD's minutes also are replete with COA requests for more resources. In the BOD minutes for October 1980, for example, the COA reported that it was doing twice the amount of accreditation as in 1975 with the same size staff. In February 1982 another COA request for funds was turned down by the Board and the same thing happened in March 1984. Again, in October 1984, a new COA chair asked for more support. Requests for funds also were made in September 1985 and June 1986. In 1988, the COA was still complaining about inadequate resources. The BOD's position continued to be that the COA had not justified added funding.

The COA's frequent requests for more support may have led the BOD to form the Brennan committee in May 1984 to study the COA's organization and workload. It examined such matters as joint visits to schools with BSW and MSW programs and extending the time between accreditations. Its recommendations were based upon telephone interviews with seven current and former members of the COA. Some of the committee's recommendations paralleled those of the deans. Unfortunately, it was not possible to track the outcome of the recommendations in the BOD's minutes. The deans would have been reassured about BOD interest in their problems had they been told about the committee's recommendations.

THE BOD AND THE COA: The BOD minutes reveal that for years the BOD and COA had serious disagreements about their respective roles. In June 1979, for example, the BOD set up a committee to study the relationship between the COA, the HOD and the Board. In September 1985, CSWE's then executive told the BOD that the COA sometimes reported on new policies to the HOD but failed to notify schools of those changes. That was a problem brought to CSWE's attention by the deans in 1973.²⁶ The executive also expressed concern about a lack of communication between the COA and the BOD and the desirability of having the COA chair attend BOD meetings to be aware of the Board's function. It is noteworthy that the COA reports to the BOD usually referred to the number and type of COA actions and rarely mentioned the ongoing dispute with the deans. Because the COA did not keep the BOD informed and the BOD failed

in its oversight, the BOD minutes convey virtually nothing of the extent and intensity of the accreditation dispute. The friction between the COA and the BOD reveals an unfortunate and continuing lack of clarity about their respective roles in an area of basic importance to the functioning of the Council. More important were the consequences this had for social work education.

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE BOD AND THE DEANS. CSWE's financial crisis was kept from its constituency for several months. When the dimensions of CSWE's loss and the BOD's efforts to minimize it became public knowledge, the HOD and the deans were angered because of what they construed as the BOD's deception. At their February 1985, meeting the deans approved recommendations for changes in CSWE and the withholding of dues unless CSWE moved toward reform.²⁷ A committee of the deans met immediately with representatives of the undergraduate program directors and the BOD and a working party was formed with members from the three groups. It was agreed that this group would focus on bylaw changes to give centrality to representation from educational institutions, to reorder CSWE's priorities to support accreditation and advocacy of social work education and to improve the quality and credibility of the accreditation process. A BOD resolution incorporating these points was presented to the HOD but was narrowly defeated. Strangely, no BOD members spoke in favor of the resolution they introduced. Hesitant to embrace reform, the BOD wanted to defer action until the following year on the grounds that HOD action was needed. Actually the BOD had the authority to act on this matter since HOD actions were only advisory. As a result of the BOD's delaying tactics the deans were asked to withhold their dues.²⁸

During ensuing negotiations and despite an earlier agreement, the BOD wanted to have negotiations conducted between three BOD members and one each from the graduate and undergraduate organizations. The deans and undergraduate directors rejected this and other BOD conditions that would delay reform. Although the deans continued to be willing to negotiate, the BOD was unwilling to act until the HOD met in March 1986. The deans committee agreed to compromise on this point but

recommended that the graduate schools withhold dues, "as a more effective means for influencing CSWE."²⁸

This account ends in 1986. In the interest of CSWE's institutional memory and from the vantage point of participants in the negotiations that followed, those negotiations ought to be in the public

record. We can only imagine what the protracted dispute over accreditation cost social work education in terms of lost opportunities. Knowing as much as possible about its history and resolution may help social work education avoid a similar needlessly destructive episode in the future.

Conclusion

Although the deans' activities were often derided as motivated by self interest and elitism, and perhaps there was some of both, that is too facile an interpretation of their efforts. If at first they placed too much emphasis on graduate education, then gradually and perhaps too gradually, that changed to concern about social work education. Despite frustration with the Council's dilatory tactics the deans avoided confrontation for as long as possible, and without rancor sought cooperation from persons they considered colleagues. While there was early consideration of withholding dues and withdrawing from CSWE, time after time the deans heeded calls to be patient and present a united front to foundations, funding bodies and the public. They also were accused of wanting to dominate CSWE.³⁰ However, seeking reform from within the system for more than a decade suggests a dedication to the integrity of social work education, reluctance to hurt the Council, and confidence that quiet diplomacy would bring CSWE to conduct its business openly and fairly.

Hopefully, the past will not be prologue and the outcome of the protracted negotiations between CSWE and the graduate and undergraduate programs will be positive for social work education. But caution is called for in dealing with CSWE. For too many years too many promises by CSWE and COA faltered when it came to implementing those promises. Sometimes that was due to a lack of candor in their dealings with the deans as well as the obduracy of ideologically committed members of the BOD and the COA. On more than one occasion each body acted recklessly in rejecting the advice of its officers, staff and attorney.³¹ Without structural changes in governance and the elimination of politics and ideology from the Board and the Commission one thing is certain. A hard lesson was learned by the graduate and undergraduate programs and they know there can be a viable alternative to the Council on Social Work Education. Perhaps at long last CSWE has learned the same lesson.

Notes

¹The minutes of the COA are not available for review, and the minutes of CSWE's BOD often are sketchy, especially about matters relating to the deans' concerns. The nature and organization of the BOD's minutes make it extremely difficult to follow how the BOD handled its business. That is especially true of its response to the financial crisis of 1984.

²Leaving CSWE was discussed at the deans' meeting in San Antonio in 1979. See also letter from the dean of the University of California, Berkeley, to nine other deans suggesting "serious consideration" of the possibility of proposing that the graduate schools organize a separate accrediting body. (letter December 8, 1981)

³Letter to CSWE President Dorothy Daly from Northwest Deans and Directors, March 7, 1980. Also according to a report by the Committee on Accreditation of the Deans' Conference in 1979, "The current accreditation standards used in social work education include considerations which amount to the imposition of requirements beyond established standards. The result has been confusion about the role and meaning of accreditation and the introduction of unnecessary subjectivity into a process which is best served by greater objectivity."

⁴In 1984 CSWE's investments collapsed almost completely resulting in a loss of more than a million dollars. The BOD had invested in the extremely risky options market which promised substantial profits. Such an investment policy is virtually unheard of among non profit organizations. Having done so the BOD failed to monitor its investments with almost fatal consequences for the Council. The gravity of the crisis was kept from the membership for months and then minimized by the president. The reluctance to share financial information with the membership was revealed when the then executive director told the deans that a detailed financial report would be too complicated for them to understand.

⁵BOD minutes between 1982 and 1986 reveal two occasions on which there was an extensive presentation and discussion of the deans' concerns at a BOD meeting. On May 18, 1983, the BOD received the deans' "Strategic Issues and Future Role of Graduate Social Work Education" (March 1983). Although it would be difficult to view it as anything other than a policy matter, the BOD minutes state it "was not distributed to CSWE as a policy statement." Instead it was referred to the Commission on Educational Policy. The BOD did not get around to discussing it until the following August. In October 1983 the BOD's attention was called to the

deans' report on excellence in education but it was not discussed at that time. Regarding the deans' concerns the minutes reveal no sense of urgency on the BOD's part.

⁶In 1981 the U.S. Department of Education asked the COA to study the reliability of COA's decisions. Perhaps due to a misunderstanding, the study was not made. At its September 1985, meeting the BOD was told that the Department continued to want such a study and that it also wanted the COA to have the same fiscal management that it asks of schools. It is not clear whether the study ever was made. (BOD minutes, September 22, 1985)

⁷*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 16, 1980, p. 10.

⁸Both the manner of the BOD's approval of the BSW as a professional degree and disagreement in principle by many of the deans helped set the stage for the dispute over accreditation. Although controversy over this issue has been muted, it continues to surface from time to time.

⁹Among other things, the Teicher committee found that the COA granted accreditation for variable periods of from two to ten years and that the COA had not developed a roster of site visitors. (Report of Committee on Accreditation (Teicher committee) Conference of Deans of Schools of Social Work, November 1, 1973).

¹⁰Letter from President, Conference of Deans to Dean Morton Teicher, dated June 26, 1974.

¹¹There was a widespread belief that some "establishment" schools received special treatment from the COA. Social work education is a small community and unusual and inexplicable disparities in the treatment of schools, for example, over compliance with affirmative action standards, inevitably surfaced. Another matter that lessened confidence in the COA's integrity was the knowledge that when challenged with legal action by a school contesting an adverse action, the COA retreated and the school received affirmation of accreditation. However, the COA did not compromise with a school that could not afford to contest an adverse action. As a result the COA appeared to base its approach to contested actions less on educational principles than on its reluctance to face a legal contest it might not win.

¹²BOD minutes, November 2 and 3, 1967, p.9.

¹³Letter from Council on Post Secondary Accreditation to Division of Educational Standards, Council on Social Work Education, April 26, 1978.

¹⁴Petition submitted to U.S. Department of Education by CSWE, June 30, 1980.

¹⁵See CSWE 77-200-1, January 1977.

¹⁶In 1987, NASW's proposal to "integrate" CSWE under its umbrella was rejected by CSWE. That and NASW's cosponsorship of a doctoral program for social workers with the Union Graduate School are examples of NASW actions of continuing concern to the deans.

¹⁷Draft revision of Standards of Accreditation. CSWE 79-200-6.

¹⁸"NOTES ON DISCUSSION AT NATIONAL DEANS CONFERENCE." New York State Association of Deans of Schools of Social Work. December 1979.

¹⁹Letter to Steering Committee on CSWE Accreditation Standards and Procedures Revision of the National Conference of Deans of Social Work Schools, from the President of the New York State Association of Deans of Schools of Social Work, January 8, 1980.

²⁰At a meeting on January 19, 1980, nine midwestern deans approved the following statement, among 12 others. "It was agreed that unless acceptable minimum standards and procedures are adopted by COA, consideration should be given to the creation of an escrow account for institutional dues to CSWE, to hold such dues until such time as COA adopts acceptable standards and procedures." (memo, Midwestern deans, January 1980.)

²¹Letter to Standards Review Committee, Commission on Accreditation, from Southwest States Deans and Directors, January 18, 1980.

²²In 1970 there were 74 MSW and no BSW programs. On a ten year cycle that would mean reviewing an average of about eight programs a year. Of course given variable periods of accreditation the workload had to be larger. By 1980 there were 261 BSW and 88 MSW programs to reaccredit. With a ten year cycle for MSW and a five year cycle for BSW programs, and excluding consideration of the new programs and other business, eventually the COA could expect to review an average of about 60 programs a year. A five year cycle for both levels would average about 70 programs a year. The seven year cycle for both levels meant an annual load of about fifty programs. Asked at an Annual Program Meeting about the COA's capacity to handle the five year cycle, COA's chair said that no estimate of future workload under the five year cycle had been made.

²³The slow pace at which the BOD acted on policy matters is illustrated in a July 8, 1981, letter to members of the HOD. The executive reported that a structure review committee would be appointed to carry out the mandate of the HOD given five years before to assess the HOD structure and make recommendations for change if necessary. [see CSWE 81-810-15] A glaring example of the attenuated response time allowed by the COA was the circulation for comment of proposed changes in accreditation standards in the Spring of 1987. The memo inviting comments on a 66 page document was dated April 6, 1987. Programs were told that because of already scheduled meetings of the COA on June 15th, "it is necessary for you to submit comments by June 1, 1987." By the time the document arrived, in many cases in mid April, some schools were into final examinations and almost ending their academic year. To allow their faculty colleagues time to deliberate the changes, the COA would have had to consider the semester's end, final examinations, the Memorial Day weekend, etc., and not its own convenience.

²⁴"Deans Meeting Agenda re Accreditation" San Diego, November, 1977.

²⁵After the 1979 deans' meeting in San Antonio a committee of deans was asked to meet with members of the COA. To prepare for that meeting the committee asked the COA chair for several items of information, including the number of schools reviewed for accreditation in the past three years, the number that had accreditation withdrawn, etc. The COA chair replied that "...questions raised in your letter of December 4th do not appear to be relevant to our planned January 18th discussion." That abrupt dismissal of the committee's request fueled later discussions of accreditation (see Conference committee letter to COA, December 4th, 1979, and COA reply, December 27, 1979)

²⁶CSWE's president had promised to provide information about accreditation developments in December 1973. See CSWE 73-200-16.

²⁷"Report to the National Conference of Deans and Directors of Graduate Schools of Social Work," from Deans' Implementation Committee, February 15, 1985.

²⁸Letter from the President to members of the American Association of Schools of Social Work, March 11, 1985.

²⁹Letter from the President to members of the American Association of Schools of Social Work. May 1, 1985.

³⁰That criticism may stem from the report of the deans' task force on the quality of social work education in 1984 and the 1983 report on the role and structure of social work education. Some saw the reports as preempting the role of CSWE. Although such activities certainly

were within CSWE's purview, the point to be taken was that it had not engaged in them.

³¹An example of that risk taking was the BOD's action on a proposed standard on affirmative action for sexual orientation. This became an issue, especially but not solely for schools under religious auspices. They had no problem with a non discrimination standard but told COA that its proposed affirmative action standard would create serious problems for them. Considerable discussion insured that the COA understood that approval of the proposed standard would violate their rights and force them to turn to the courts for relief.

Knowing this the COA sent its original standard to the BOD for action. At its March 1981 meeting the BOD was told by staff that the courts did not view accreditation as a vehicle for social change and that COPA might approve a separate accreditation body for programs under religious auspices. In addition the Council risked legal action. Although the officers counseled against doing so, the BOD approved the standard. According to CSWE's then president, "The best we were able to do was to defer for a year the implementation of the whole group of standards." What eventually emerged, however, was the non discrimination standard originally suggested.

Appendix

In February 1973, the Conference of Deans established a committee on accreditation with the charge to: "receive from the deans and formulate questions about both the substance and procedures of accreditation upon which the deans want specific information and about which they are concerned." A memo from Dean Teicher to deans (June 19, 1973) listed the following questions for the COA.

I. Structure

Commission on Accreditation

1. How are Commission on Accreditation members selected? Is there a formula for composing the membership of the Commission?
2. To whom is the Commission accountable?

Site Teams

1. How are site visiting teams selected?
2. How are site visiting team members trained?
3. How should the panel of potential site visiting team members be determined?
4. What is the function of the site visiting team?

II. Commission Policies

1. What is the interval between accreditation determinations?

During the last three years, what has been the actual practice with respect to the length of time for which schools have been accredited?

2. What is the policy of the Commission with respect to confidentiality?
3. What is the balance between using the accreditation procedure to determine whether or not a School meets academic standards and using it to bring about social reform?

III. Accreditation Procedures

1. How can we deal with the gap between the comments of the team at the time of the site visit and the final report of the Commission to the school?
2. What is the procedure for appealing decisions of the Commission? How is the machinery used? With what effect?
3. Should there be a grievance procedure to deal with complaints which is separate from the Commission?
4. What are the sources of data for the Commission in making decisions? What is the standing of information other than the self-study submitted by the School and the report of the site visiting team?
5. What is the procedure for deferring or postponing a decision by the Commission?

6. What is the procedure and policy with respect to probationary status?
7. What is the process for adjudicating complaints?
8. What is the practice in other professions with respect to the presence of a school representative at the discussions of the accrediting body prior to its making a decision?

It was also recommended that the Committee review the Accreditation Manual since some of these questions are answered there.

Tentative recommendations offered by the Committee and augmented by the Conference of Deans are as follows:

I. Commission on Accreditation

1. The Commission should publish an Annual Report of decisions, procedures, and policies.
2. A School representative should be present at the discussions of the Commission before it makes a decision.

3. The Conference of Deans should be represented on the Commission.
4. The length of time for which a school is accredited should be publicized.
5. The interval between accreditation determinations should be ten years.

II. Site Teams

1. A rotating panel of potential members of site visiting teams should be selected and their names published annually in the Social Work Education Reporter.
2. Qualifications for membership on site visiting teams should be established and published.
3. The length of the site visit should provide ample opportunity for the team members to confer before and after the visit.